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Little Journeys
to the Homes of
Famous Women
by Elbert Hubbard

Jane Austen

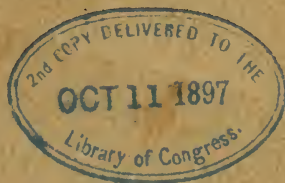
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Little Journeys

SERIES FOR 1897

Little Journeys to the Homes of Famous Women

Described by ELBERT HUBBARD

- No. 1.—Elizabeth Barrett Browning
“ 2.—Madame Guyon
“ 3.—Harriet Martineau
“ 4.—Charlotte Brontë
“ 5.—Christina Rossetti
“ 6.—Rosa Bonheur
“ 7.—Madame de Staël
“ 8.—Elizabeth Fry
“ 9.—Mary Lamb
“ 10.—Jane Austen
“ 11.—Empress Josephine
“ 12.—Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley

The above papers, which will form the series of *Little Journeys* for the year 1897, will be issued monthly, beginning in January.

The numbers will be printed uniform in size with the series of 1895 and 1896, but a vellum deckel-edge paper will be used, and each number will have a portrait as frontispiece. The price of the series of 12 numbers for 1897 will be \$1.00 per year; and for single copies 10 cents, postage paid.

The price for sets or for single copies of the series for 1895 and 1896 will remain as before, 50 cents for the set and 5 cents per copy.

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JANE AUSTEN

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Delaforde is a nice place I can tell you ; exactly what I call a nice old-fashioned place, full of comforts, quite shut in with great garden walls that are covered with fruit trees and such a mulberry tree in the corner. Then there is a dovecote, some delightful fish ponds, and a very pretty canal, and everything, in short, that one could wish for ; and moreover it 's close to the church and only a quarter of a mile from the turnpike road.

Sense and Sensibility.



J. Austen

JANE AUSTEN.

I.

IT was at Cambridge, England, I met him—a fine intelligent clergyman he was, too. “He’s not a ’Varsity man,” said my new acquaintance, speaking of Dr. Joseph Parker, the world’s greatest preacher. “If he were he would n’t do all these preposterous things, you know.”

“He’s a little like Henry Irving,” I ventured apologetically.

“True, and what absurd mannerisms—did you ever see the like! Yes, one’s from Yorkshire and the other from Cornwall, and both are Philistines.”

He laughed at his joke and so did I, for I always try to be polite.

Jane Austen

So I went my way, and as I strolled it came to me that my clerical friend was right—a university course would have taken all the individuality out of these strong men and made of their genius a purely neutral decoction.

And when I thought further and considered how much learning has done to banish wisdom, it was a satisfaction to remember that Shakespeare at Oxford did nothing beyond making the acquaintance of an inn-keeper's wife.

It hardly seems possible that a Harvard degree would have made a stronger man of Abraham Lincoln ; or that Edison, whose brain has wrought greater changes than that of any other man of the century, was the loser by not being versed in physics as taught at Yale.

The Law of Compensation never rests, and the men who are taught too much from books are not taught by Deity. Most education in the past has failed to awaken in its subject a degree of intellectual consciousness. It is the education

Jane Austen

that the Jesuits served out to the Indian. It made him peaceable but took all dignity out of him. From a noble red man he descended into a dirty Injun, who signed away his heritage for rum.

The world's plan of education has mostly been priestly—we have striven to inculcate trust and reverence. We have cited authorities and quoted precedents and given examples: it was a matter of memory: while all the time the whole spiritual acreage was left untilled.

A race educated in this way never advances, save as it is jolted out of its notions by men with either a sublime ignorance of, or an indifference to what has been done and said. These men are always called barbarians by their contemporaries: they are jeered and hooted. They supply much mirth by their eccentricities. After they are dead the world sometimes canonizes them and carves on their tombs the word "Savior."

Do I then plead the cause of ignorance? Well, yes, rather so. A little ignorance

Jane Austen

is not a dangerous thing. A man who reads too much—who accumulates too many facts—gets his mind filled to the point of saturation ; matters then crystallize and his head becomes a solid thing that refuses to let anything either in or out. In his soul there is no guest-chamber. His only hope for progress lies in another incarnation.

And so a certain ignorance seems a necessary equipment for the doing of a great work. To live in a big city and know what others are doing and saying ; to meet the learned and powerful, and hear their sermons and lectures ; to view the unending shelves of vast libraries is to be discouraged at the start. And thus we find that genius is essentially rural—a country product. Salons, soirées, theatres, concerts, lectures, libraries, produce a fine mediocrity that smiles at the right time and bows when 't is proper, but it is well to bear in mind that George Eliot, Elizabeth Barrett, Charlotte Brontë, and Jane Austen were all

Jane Austen

country girls, with little companionship, nourished on picked-up classics, having a healthy ignorance of what the world was saying and doing.

II.

JANE AUSTEN lived a hundred years ago. But when you tramp that five miles from Overton, where the railroad station is, to Steventon, where she was born, it does n't seem like it. Rural England does not change much. Great fleecy clouds roll lazily across the blue, overhead, and the hedgerows are full of twittering birds that you hear but seldom see ; and the pastures contain mild-eyed cows that look at you with wide-open eyes over the stone walls, and in the towering elm trees that sway their branches in the breeze crows hold a noisy caucus. And it comes to you that the clouds and the blue sky and the hedgerows and the birds and the cows and the crows are all just as Jane Austen knew them—no change. These stone

Jane Austen

walls stood here then and so did the low slate-roofed barns and the whitewashed cottages where the roses clamber over the doors.

I paused in front of one of these snug, homely, handsome pretty little cottages and looked at the two exact rows of flowers that lined the little walk leading from gate to cottage door. The pathway was made from coal ashes and the flower-beds were marked off by pieces of broken crockery set on edge. 'T was an absent-minded, impolite thing to do—to stand leaning on a gate and critically examine the landscape gardening, evidently an overworked woman's gardening, at that.

As I leaned there the door opened and a little woman with sleeves rolled up appeared. I mumbled an apology, but before I could articulate it she held out a pair of scissors and said, "Perhaps, sir, you'd like to clip some of the flowers—the roses over the door are best!"

Three children hung to her skirts,

Jane Austen

peeking 'round faces from behind, and quite accidentally disclosing a very neat ankle.

I took the scissors and clipped three splendid Jacqueminots and said it was a beautiful day. She agreed with me and added that she was just finishing her churning and if I'd wait a minute until the butter came, she'd give me a drink of buttermilk.

I waited without urging and got the buttermilk, and as the children had come out from hiding I was minded to give them a penny apiece. Two coppers were all I could muster, so I gave the two boys each a penny and the little girl a shilling. The mother protested that she had no change and that a bob was too much for a little girl like that, but I assumed a Big-Bonanza air and explained that I was from California where the smallest change is a dollar.

“Go thank the gentleman, Jane.”

“That's right, Jane Austen, come here and thank me!”

Jane Austen

"How did you know her name was Jane Austen—Jane Austen Humphreys?"

"I did n't know—I only guessed."

Then little Mrs. Humphreys ceased patting the butter and told me that she named her baby girl for Jane Austen, who used to live near here a long time ago. Jane Austen was one of the greatest writers that ever lived—the Rector said so. The Rev. George Austen preached at Steventon for years and years, and I should go and see the church—the same church where he preached and where Jane Austen used to go. And anything I wanted to know about Jane Austen's books the Rector could tell for he was a wonderful learned man was the Rector—

"Kiss the gentleman, Jane."

So I kissed Jane Austen's round, rosy cheek and stroked the tousled heads of the two boys by way of blessing, and started for Steventon to interview the Rector who was very wise.

And the clergyman who teaches his people the history of their neighborhood,

Jane Austen

and tells them of the excellent men and women who once lived thereabouts, is both wise and good. And the present Rector at Steventon is both—I'm sure of that.

III.

IT was a very happy family that lived in the Rectory at Steventon from 1775 to 1801. There were five boys and two girls, and the youngest girl's name was Jane. Between her and James, the oldest boy, lay a period of twelve years of three hundred and sixty-five days each, not to mention leap years.

The boys were sent away to be educated, and when they came home at holiday time they brought presents for the mother and the girls and there was great rejoicing.

James was sent to Oxford. The girls were not sent away to be educated—it was thought hardly worth while then to educate women, and some folks still hold to that belief. When the boys came home, they were made to stand by the

Jane Austen

door jamb, and a mark was placed on the casing, with a date, which showed how much they had grown. And they were catechized as to their knowledge and cross-questioned and their books inspected ; and so we find one of the sisters saying, once, that she knew all of the things her brothers knew, and besides that she knew all the things she knew herself.

There were plenty of books in the library and the girls made use of them. They would read to their father "because his eyesight was bad," but I cannot help thinking this a clever ruse on the part of the good Rector.

I do not find that there were any secrets in that household, or that either Mr. or Mrs. Austen ever said that children should be seen and not heard. It was a little republic of letters—all their own. Thrown in on themselves, for not many of the yeomanry thereabouts could read, there was developed a fine spirit of comradeship among parents and children,

Jane Austen

brothers and sisters, servants and visitors, that is a joy to contemplate. Before the days of railroads a "visitor" was more of an institution than he is now. He stayed longer and was more welcome; and the news he brought from distant parts was eagerly asked for. Nowadays we know all about everything, almost before it happens, for yellow journalism is so alert that it discounts futurity.

In the Austen household had lived and died a son of Warren Hastings. The lad had so won the love of the Austens that they even spoke of him as their own; and this bond also linked them to the great outside world of statecraft. The things the elders discussed were the properties too of the children.

Then once a year the Bishop came—came in knee breeches, hob-nailed shoes, and shovel hat, and the little church was decked with greens. The Bishop came from Paradise, little Jane used to think, and once, to be polite, she asked him how all the folks were in Heaven. Then

Jane Austen

the other children giggled and the Bishop spilt a whole cup of tea down the front of his best coat, and coughed and choked until he was very red in the face.

When Jane was ten years old there came to live at the Rectory a daughter of Mrs. Austen's sister. She came to them direct from France. Her name was Madame Fenillade. She was a widow and only twenty-two. Once when little Jane overheard one of the brothers say that Monsieur Fenillade had kissed Mademoiselle Guillotine, she asked what he meant and they would not tell her.

Now Madame spoke French with grace and fluency, and the girls thought it queer that there should be two languages—English and French—so they picked up a few words of French, too, and at the table would gravely say "Merci, Papa," and "S' il vous plaît, Mamma." Then Mr. Austen proposed that at table no one should speak anything but French. So Madame told them what to call the sugar and the salt and the bread, and no one

Jane Austen

called anything except by its French name. In two weeks each of the whole dozen persons who sat at that board, as well as the girl who waited on table, had a bill-of-fare working capital of French. In six months they could converse with ease.

And science with all its ingenuity has not yet pointed out a better way for acquiring a new language, than the plan the Austens adopted at Steventon Rectory. We call it the "Berlitz Method" now.

Madame Fenillade's widowhood rested lightly upon her, and she became quite the life of the whole household.

One of the Austen boys fell in love with the French widow; and surely it would be a very stupid country boy that would n't love a French widow like that!

And they were married and lived happily ever afterward.

But before Madame married and moved away she taught the girls charades, and then little plays, and a theatrical performance was given in the barn.

Jane Austen

Then a play could not be found that just suited, so Jane wrote one and Cassandra helped, and Madame criticised and the Rev. Mr. Austen suggested a few changes. Then it was all rewritten. And this was the first attempt at writing for the public by Jane Austen.

IV.

JANE AUSTEN wrote four great novels. *Pride and Prejudice* was begun when she was twenty and finished a year later. The old father started a course of novel-reading on his own account in order to fit his mind to pass judgment on his daughter's work. He was sure it was good, but feared that love had blinded his eyes and he wanted to make sure. After six months' comparison he wrote to a publisher explaining that he had the MS. of a great novel that would be parted with for a consideration. He assured the publisher that the novel was as excellent as any Miss Burney, Miss Edgeworth, or anyone else ever wrote.

Now publishers get letters like that by every mail, and when Mr. Austen

Jane Austen

received his reply it was so antarctic in sentiment that the MS. was stored away in the garret where it lay for just eleven years before it found a publisher. But in the meantime Miss Austen had written three other novels—not with much hope that anyone would publish them, but to please her father and the few intimate friends who read and sighed and smiled in quiet.

The year she was thirty years of age her father died—died with no thought that the world would yet endorse his own loving estimate of his daughter's worth.

After the father's death financial troubles came and something had to be done to fight off possible hungry wolves. The MS. was hunted out, dusted, gone over, and submitted to publishers. They sniffed at it and sent it back. Finally a man was found who was bold enough to read. He liked it but would n't admit the fact. Yet he decided to print it. He did so. The reading world liked it

Jane Austen

and said so, although not very loudly. Slowly the work made head, and small-sized London drafts were occasionally sent by publishers to Miss Austen with apologies because the amounts were not larger.

Now in reference to writing books it may not be amiss to explain that no one ever said, "Now then, I'll write a story!" and sitting down at table took up pen and dipping it in ink, wrote. Stories don't come that way. Stories take possession of one—incident after incident—and you write in order to get rid of 'em—with a few other reasons mixed in, for motives, like silver, are always found mixed. Children play at keeping house: and men and women who have loved think of the things that might have happened, imagine all the things that might have happened, and from thinking it all over to writing it out is but a step. You begin one chapter and write it this forenoon, and do all you may to banish the plot the next chapter is all in your head

before sundown. Next morning you write chapter number two, to unload it, and so the story spins itself out into a book. All this if you live in the country and have time to think and are not broken in upon by too much work and worry—save the worry of the ever restless mind. Whether the story is good or not depends upon what you leave out.

The sculptor produces the beautiful statue by chipping away such parts of the marble block as are not needed.

Really happy people do not write stories—they accumulate adipose tissue and die at the top through fatty degeneration of the cerebrum. A certain disappointment in life, a dissatisfaction with environment, is necessary to stir the imagination to a creative point. If things are all to your taste you sit back and enjoy them. You forget the flight of time, the march of the seasons, your future life, family, country—all, just as Antony did in Egypt. A deadly, languor-

Jane Austen

ous satisfaction comes over you. Pain, disappointment, unrest, or a joy that hurts, are the things that prick the mind into activity.

Jane Austen lived in a little village. She felt the narrowness of her life—the inability of those beyond her own household to match her thoughts and emotions. Love came that way—a short heart-rest, a being understood, were hers. The gates of Paradise swung ajar and she caught a glimpse of the glories within, and sighed and clasped her hands and bowed her head in a prayer of thankfulness.

When she arose from her knees the gates were closed; the way was dark; she was alone—alone in a little quibbling, carping village, where tired folks worked and gossiped, ate, drank, slept. Her home was pleasant, to be sure, but man is a citizen of the world, not of a house.

Jane Austen began to write—to write about these village people. Jane was tall, and twenty—not very handsome, but better, she was good-looking. She looked

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good because she was. She was pious, but not too pious. She used to go calling among the parishioners, visiting the sick, the lowly, the troubled. Then when Great Folks came down from London to "the Hall," she went with the Rector to call on them too, for the Rector was servant to all—his business was to minister: he was a Minister. And the Reverend George Austen was a bit proud of his youngest daughter. She was just as tall as he, and dignified and gentle: and the clergyman chuckled quietly to himself to see how she was the equal in grace and intellect of any Fine Lady from Londontown.

And although the good Rector prayed, "From all vanity and pride of spirit, good Lord, deliver us," it never occurred to him that he was vain of his tall daughter Jane, and I'm glad it did n't. There is no more crazy bumble-bee gets into a mortal's bonnet than the buzzing thought that God is jealous of the affection we have for our loved ones. If we

Jane Austen

are ever damned, it will be because we have too little love for our fellows, not too much.

But, egad ! brother, it's no small delight to be sixty and a little stooped and a trifle rheumatic, and have your own blessed daughter, sweet and stately, comb your thinning grey locks, help you on with your overcoat, find your cane, and go trooping with you, hand in hand, down the lane on merciful errand bent. It's a temptation to grow old and feign sciatica ; and if you could only know that, someday, like old King Lear, upon your withered cheek would fall Cordelia's tears, the thought would be a solace.

So Jane Austen began to write stories about the simple folks she knew. She wrote in the family sitting-room at a little mahogany desk that she could shut up quickly if prying neighbors came in to tell their woes and ask questions about all those sheets of paper ! And all she wrote she read to her father and to her sister Cassandra.

Jane Austen

And they talked it all over together and laughed and cried and joked over it. The kind old minister thought it a good mental drill for his girls to write and express their feelings. The two girls collaborated—that is to say one wrote and the other looked on. Neither girl had been “educated,” except what their father taught them. But to be born into a bookish family, and inherit the hospitable mind and the receptive heart, is better than to be sent to Harvard Annex.

Preachers, like other folks, sometimes assume a virtue when they have it not. But George Austen did n’t pretend—he was. And that’s the better plan, for no man can deceive his children—they take his exact measurement, whether others ever do or not ; and the only way to win and hold the love of a child (or a grown-up) is to be frank and simple and honest. I’ve tried both schemes.

I cannot find that George Austen ever claimed he was only a worm of the dust, or pretended to be more or less than he

Jane Austen

was, or to assume a knowledge that he did not possess. He used to say, " My Dears, I really do not know. But let 's keep the windows open and light may yet come."

It was a busy family of plain average people—not very rich, and not very poor. There were difficulties to meet, and troubles to share, and joys to divide.

Jane Austen was born in 1775; "Jane Eyre" in 1816—one year before Jane Austen died.

Charlotte Brontë knew all about Jane Austen, and her example fired Charlotte's ambition. Both were daughters of country clergymen. Charlotte lived in the north of England on the wild and treeless moors, where the searching winds rattled the panes and black-faced sheep bleated piteously. Jane Austen lived in the rich quiet of a prosperous farming country, where bees made honey and larks nested. The Rev. Patrick Brontë disciplined his children: George Austen loved his. In Steventon there is no "Black Bull"; only a little dehorned inn, kept by a

Jane Austen

woman who hatches canaries, and will sell you a warranted singer for five shillings, with no charge for the cage. At Steventon no red-haired Yorkshiremen offer to give fight or challenge you to a drinking-bout.

The opposites of things are alike, and that is why the world ties Jane Eyre and Jane Austen in one bundle. Their methods of work were totally different : their effects gotten in different ways. Charlotte Brontë fascinates by startling situations and highly colored lights that dance and glow, leading you on in a mad chase. There 's pain, unrest, tragedy in the air. The pulse always is rapid and the temperature high.

It is not so with Jane Austen. She is an artist in her gentleness, and the world is to-day recognizing this more and more. The stage now works its spells by her methods—without rant, cant, or fustian—and as the years go by this must be so more and more, for mankind's face is turned toward truth.

Jane Austen

To weave your spell out of commonplace events and brew a love-potion from every-day materials is high art. When Kipling takes three average soldiers of the line, ignorant, lying, swearing, smoking, dog-fighting soldiers, who can even run on occasion, and by telling of them hold a world in thrall—that's art! In these soldiers three we recognize something very much akin to ourselves, for the thing that holds no relationship to us does not interest us—we cannot leave the personal equation out. This fact is made plain in *The Black Riders*, where the devils dancing in Tophet look up and espying Steve Crane, address him thus: "Brother!"

Jane Austen's characters are all plain, every-day folks. The work is always quiet. There are no entangling situations, no mysteries, no surprises.

Now, to present a situation, an emotion, so it will catch and hold the attention of others, is largely a knack—you practise on the thing until you do it

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well. This one thing I do. But the man who does this thing is not intrinsically any greater than those who appreciate it—in fact they are all made of the same kind of stuff. Kipling himself is quite a commonplace person. He is neither handsome nor magnetic. He is plain and manly and would fit in anywhere. If there was a trunk to be carried upstairs, or an ox to get out of a pit, you 'd call on Kipling if he chanced that way, and he 'd give you a lift as a matter of course, and then go on whistling with hands in his pockets. His art is a knack practised to a point that gives facility.

Jane Austen was a commonplace person. She swept, sewed, worked, and did the duty that lay nearest her. She wrote because she liked to, and because it gave pleasure to others. She wrote as well as she could. She had no thought of immortality, or that she was writing for the ages—no more than Shakespeare had. She never anticipated that Southey, Coleridge, Lamb, Guizot, and Macaulay

Jane Austen

would hail her as a marvel of insight, nor did she suspect that a woman as great as George Eliot would declare her work flawless.

But to-day strong men recognize her books as rarely excellent, because they show the divinity in all things, keep close to the ground; gently inculcate the firm belief that simple people are as necessary as great ones, that small things are not necessarily unimportant, and that nothing is really insignificant. It all rings true.

And so I sing the praises of the average woman—the woman who does her work, who is willing to be unknown, who is modest and unaffected, who tries to lessen the pains of earth, and to add to its happiness. She is the true guardian angel of mankind!

No book published in Jane Austen's lifetime bore her name on the title-page; she was never lionized by society; she was never two hundred miles from home; she died when forty-two years of age, and

Jane Austen

it was sixty years before a biography was attempted or asked for. She sleeps in the cathedral at Winchester, and not so very long ago a visitor, on asking the vergers to see her grave, was conducted thither, and the vergers asked, "Was she anybody in particular? so many folks ask where she 's buried, you know!"

But this is changed now, for when the vergers took me to her grave and we stood by that plain black marble slab, he spoke intelligently of her life and work. And many visitors now go to the cathedral only because it is the resting-place of Jane Austen, who lived a beautiful, helpful life and produced great art, yet knew it not.

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